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# Tell a Story, Get a Job

*By Eckhart Beatty*

Speaking to an eager audience full of a number of job seekers at our March 2003 meeting, Mark Schaltz, an IT manager at ChevronTexaco, outlined the essential methods and practices interviewees should know before going into an interview.

Shaltz knows what he's talking about. He has been teaching interviewing techniques for over 15 years at his present firm. All told, he boasts over 20 years IT experience at Fortune 100 companies.

## Behavior-Based Interviewing

Before getting into what he meant by "Tell a Story, Get a Job," Shaltz started his talk by emphasizing interview basics. He began with that all-important rule "first impressions count." This means that you should make it a point of dressing for the occasion, even if the company's standard is "dress casual." And don't worry about feeling over-dressed. It's better to err on the side of caution. Other keys to making a good first impression include a solid handshake, consistent eye-contact, and using your interviewer's name during the conversation.

When he was through with the basics, Shaltz introduced the group to behavior-based interviewing—the method of interviewing behind the meeting's name. This method can be remembered using the acronym STAR: "S" refers to Situation; "T" to Task; "A" to Action; and "R" to Result. As the acronym suggests, behavior-based interviewing focuses on using situations from personal experiences to showcase your qualifications for accomplishing tasks in ways that are memorable. Thus, throughout the interview, you are always illustrating how you are capable of taking action to get good results.

To be proficient at this type of interviewing, you should begin collecting a file of stories which are organized according to sets of skills, talents, etc. These stories should be both human and interesting. For example, if you had a boss that you didn't get along with, think about how you overcame this difficult situation. Really explore this question and come up with a unique response. Perhaps you learned ways of communicating via email that were less confrontational than in-person. Or maybe, you discovered that certain times of day were easier to work with him than others. Poignant examples of ways you have dealt with situations diplomatically demonstrate that you can overcome obstacles and make effective decisions.

A very important rule for this type of interviewing is to always get right to the point. No one likes to listen to long stories that don't seem to be going anywhere. You should be sure to introduce a situation and be wrapping up with how you got results within just a few minutes. There's no substitute for solid preparation here.

Finally, Shaltz made sure that other key points to good interviewing were emphasized. To make the experience a positive one for both you and the interviewer, always try to be an active participant in the interview by gently guiding the conversation along. However, be conscious that you aren't dominating the conversation or taking control away from the interviewer. Remember your job is to enable the interviewer do his job well. This way, you get the job. Make it a win-win situation.

The day after your interview, always remember to send a letter or email of thanks (whether or not you want the job). This practice reinforces a professional image and makes you stand out from the crowd.

Attitude is key. So take stock of your situation, move decisively, and get that job.

*Eckhart Beatty is a contract technical writer in the Bay area.*

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# June 18th Meeting

## Tips and Tricks for FrameMaker

*Presenter: Marc Smircich*

FrameMaker is an excellent tool for producing large documents. But it does have a steep learning curve, and the user interface is not always intuitive. During this talk, I'll share some things I've learned from using FrameMaker to produce and maintain about a dozen large manuals. Some of the topics include setting up styles so they are easy to select, using shortcuts and variables to make writing go faster, considerations for PDF publishing, and indexing.

*Marc Smircich is the outgoing President of the San Francisco Chapter STC. He has 14 years of experience writing user manuals for financial and human resources applications. His background also includes a B.A. in English from the University of Texas and work experience as a self-taught word processor, computer operator, and computer programmer. He is currently employed as a senior technical writer at Quintessential School Systems in San Mateo.*

# July 16th Meeting

## Marketing Yourself in Tough Times

*Moderator: Susan Becker*

*Speakers: Dana Chisnell of Usability Works, Andrew Davis of Synergistech, Gwaltney Mountford of Mountford Group Inc., and others.*

Getting a job or finding a contract as a Technical Communicator can be challenging, especially in the current economic climate. But don't give up! At this "progression," we will set up stations to focus on specific marketing tools such as networking, resumes, portfolios, personal Web sites, volunteering, and internships. At each station, a technical communicator, who has actually found work in the past year with the tool, will give a short presentation and lead a follow-up discussion.

In case you've never participated in a progression, it is a series of small group exchanges consisting of three rounds of five-minute presentations followed by fifteen-minute discussions. We've never tried a progression at the London Wine Bar. It should be wild!

Bring your resume, portfolio, business cards, experiences, and hopes! Take home a few new ideas and perhaps a little more energy for your next job search.

**SEE INSIDE FOR MEETING TIMES, LOCATION, & MORE DETAILS!**

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